

The UN Human Rights Chief Has Called for an Investigation Into the Zionist Regime's Use of "High-Impact Explosive Weapons" in Gaza, Which Was Causing Indiscriminate Destruction in the Besieged Palestinian Enclave

IRAN NEWS

President Ebrahim Raisi Attended a Meeting With the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on the Sidelines of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Leaders of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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IRGC Intelligence Forces Bust Anti-Revolutionary Terrorist Team



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) intelligence forces have disbanded an anti-revolutionary terrorist team that had plotted to carry out assassinations in the country's southeastern province of Kerman. Ebrahim Hamidi, head of the provincial judiciary office, said on Saturday that members of the pro-monarchy terror team were identified and arrested following intricate surveillance operations. The terrorists were in contact with hostile elements and foreign-based anti-Iran media outlets, and had taken a series of measures over the past year to undermine security, such as attacks on various facilities, acts of vandalism against public properties, setting city banners ablaze, distribution of anti-revolutionary leaflets, and sending video clips to foreign-based satellite television channels, Hamidi added. The senior judiciary official highlighted that members of the terrorist team had received orders from pro-monarchy terrorist ringleaders, and were involved in armed activities. The arrestees had plans to assassinate a provincial security force, and also target members of the morality police. The IRGC forces, however, could foil their plot and capture them, Hamidi pointed out. Back in late September, Iranian intelligence forces thwarted a plot to carry out a string of terrorist bombing attacks in the capital Tehran, arresting dozens of elements linked with Daesh Takfiri terrorist group. The Iranian Intelligence Ministry announced in a statement at the time that its forces had foiled a ferocious plot to carry out 30 simultaneous bombing attacks on populous areas of Tehran, and had arrested all terrorists involved in the plot.



Raisi in Riyadh Says U.S. Stonewalling Gaza Ceasefire

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says the U.S. is stonewalling a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip as he starts a visit to Saudi Arabia to attend an emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). President Raisi arrived in Saudi Arabia on Saturday, his first visit since the two countries agreed to restore diplomatic relations in March. Footage aired on the al-Ekhabriya channel showed Raisi, wearing a traditional Palestinian keffiyeh scarf, greeting Saudi officials at the airport after disembarking from his plane. "If the crimes being committed nowadays in Gaza are not crimes against humanity, what is a fine example of such criminal acts then?" he said at Mehrabad airport in Tehran before heading to the kingdom. "America declares in its statements that it does not want the scope of the war to expand and has even sent messages to Iran and some countries. 'The statement is, however, not consistent with its actions. America is directing the war machine in Gaza. It is blocking a ceasefire in Gaza and expanding the scope of the war. The true nature of the United States must be exposed to the entire world,'" the Iranian president noted. Raisi highlighted that his trip comes at the invitation of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, whose country currently holds the rotating presidency of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. He went on to state that the Iranian request for an extraordinary summit on Gaza conflict dates back to a month ago. "Heads of Muslim countries are expected to come up with a landmark decision on the issue of Palestine, which is the most pressing matter in the world. This decision should then be fully implemented and put into effect. This arena is no longer the sphere of words and declaration of positions. It should be the scene of actions," the Iranian president underlined. Raisi described the immediate cessation of Israeli bombardments, mechanisms aimed at helping the oppressed and resilient people of Gaza, removal of the Israeli blockade on the territory, and realization of Gazans' rights as the primary responsibilities of the OIC, stressing that the intergovernmental organization was originally founded to resolve the Palestinian issue. "Upon my return from Tashkent, I stated that the issue of Palestine had overshadowed all other topics at the 16th ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) Summit. I hope to make the Iranian nation's voice heard, and that convergence and unity of Muslim countries could solve the Palestinian conflict," he said. Raisi highlighted that all thinkers, scholars and the intelligentsia across the globe have expressed their solidarity with Palestinians, saying, "The international community is loudly protesting at the U.S. support for the Zionist regime's crimes and genocide, which in fact amount to war crimes."

U.S. Can't Save Israel From Inevitable Collapse



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian commander says the Israeli regime will "definitely collapse" and the United States cannot save it by giving it artificial respiration. Speaking at a ceremony in the Iranian capital of Tehran, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) extolled the surprise attack by Palestinian resistance groups against Israeli forces in the occupied territories on October 7. Major General Hossein Salami said the Israeli regime's "deterrence capacity" is exhausted. Salami was speaking on the 35th day of Operation al-Aqsa Storm, the largest military operation by the Gaza Strip-based resistance groups against the occupying regime in decades. "At least 1,500 Palestinians launched an attack, and during the attack and on the [Israeli] front line, which is the strongest defense line in the world, not a single Palestinian was martyred and not a single shot was fired, and all the weapons were disabled even though all the settlers were armed," Salami said. "The Israeli occupation army had stationed a reliable and strong defense system near the Gaza Strip but they failed to notice; and one noticed," he stated. The IRGC chief said the mystery of the Palestinians' sneak passage through Israeli walls, embankments and information and security barriers is unknown and the secrets of the victory on October 7 will probably be revealed later. "Today, the deterrence capacity of the Zionist regime has been broken," Salami stated. "The United States cannot save the regime; it cannot give it artificial respiration. The Zionist regime has no roots in the political geography of this region and will definitely collapse," he said. The Palestinian resistance movements of Hamas and Islamic Jihad fired about 5,000 missiles at the occupied territories, killing at least 1,400 Israeli troops and settlers, also taking captive some 250 Israelis during their attack.

Gaza Genocide a Test of Humanity's Conscience



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign ministry spokesman has called for global action to stop Israeli atrocities in Gaza, saying the crisis in Gaza is a test of humanity's conscience. "Gaza is a test for humanity to test its conscience! No living and awakened conscience will remain silent after seeing images of the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza, the complete siege of over 2 million people, the bombing of hospitals and the killing of patients, and the siege of the children's hospital," Nasser Kanani wrote in a post on X. Kanani said the world shouldn't wait for the UN Security Council, as considering the Western support for Israel, the council has no will to put an end to the genocide in Gaza. "Is the world waiting for the UN Security Council? This council has no will to stop the Zionist regime's killing machine and end the genocide of Palestinians under the shadow of the US veto and the support of England and France for the evil Zionist regime!" The spokesman also slammed the US support for Israel, saying it further emboldens the regime to commit crimes. "This stain will never be removed from America's forehead that with the full support of the US government, the Israeli regime is freely massacring and genociding Palestinians!" The war started after the territory's resistance movements waged a surprise attack against the occupying entity, dubbed Operation al-Aqsa Storm, in response to its decades-long campaign of bloodletting and devastation against Palestinians.

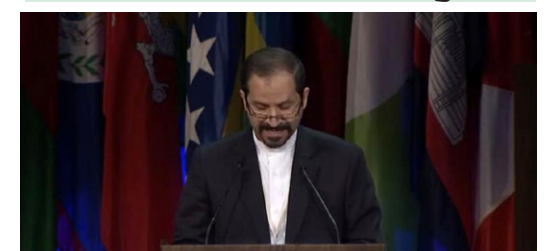
Iran's Expanding Oil Trade With Top Buyer China

LONDON (Dispatches) - China's oil imports from Iran have hit record highs as Iran ramps up output despite the threat of further U.S. sanctions. Existing sanctions were implemented over Iran's nuclear programme, and U.S. lawmakers are seeking to exert further pressure after the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas, which has long been backed by Iran, although Tehran has denied any involvement. U.S. lawmakers are now considering legislation that could impose measures on foreign ports and refineries that process petroleum exported from Iran. China, the world's largest crude importer and Iran's top customer, bought an average 1.05 million barrels per day (bpd) of Iranian oil in the first 10 months of 2023, according to shiptracking data from Vortexa. This is 60% above pre-sanction peaks recorded by Chinese customs in 2017. Imports jumped this year after Tehran raised output and offered steep discounts. Tehran's October output edged up to 3.17 million bpd, a Reuters survey found, the highest since 2018, when Washington re-imposed sanctions on Iran, according to Reuters surveys and OPEC figures. China's October imports from Iran are estimated to have reached around 1.45 million bpd, the highest monthly level ever, Vortexa data showed. Except for two cargoes in December 2021 and January 2022, China's customs has not recorded any direct imports from Iran since December 2020. China regulates crude oil imports by issuing quotas. Earlier this year when quotas were tight, traders labelled a few Iranian heavy crude

shipments as bitumen mix, prompting Chinese authorities to step up tanker inspections. Giant state refiners Sinopec and PetroChina were once key Iranian oil clients, with investments in oilfields in the country. But they have stopped lifting Iranian oil since late 2019, after then-U.S. President Donald Trump re-imposed sanctions on Tehran's petroleum exports. The sanctions initially led to a sharp drop in flows to China, but volumes have rebounded as more independent refiners joined the purchases. Most of the more than 40 independent Chinese refiners, known as teapots, process Iranian oil, according to Chinese traders. Teapots have little exposure to the dollar-based global financial system and don't need to cooperate with western firms on technology. Most of the transactions are believed to be paid in Chinese currency. Mainly because the oil is cheap and of good quality and for this reason Chinese refineries prefer Iran's oil. Iranian Light, the main export grade, trades at a discount of about \$13 a barrel to ICE Brent on a deliver-ex-ship basis in Shandong for December arrival. That compares with a premium of about \$5 a barrel for similar-quality Oman crude. China also buys crude from Russia and Venezuela - which have also faced U.S. sanctions. Beijing has long opposed unilateral sanctions and has said its normal trade deserves respect and protection. However, China's last Iranian oil cargo officially recorded by customs was in early 2022, destined for state reserves.



Iran Offers Program to UNESCO to Facilitate Exchange of Ideas and Knowledge



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Deputy Minister of Science, Research and Technology Peyman Salehi has suggested a program to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to facilitate the free exchange of ideas and knowledge. "The Islamic Republic of Iran, suggests that a program entitled, 'Science Road', be defined and initiated by UNESCO to facilitate the free exchange of ideas and knowledge and it declares its preparation to make use of all its historical and contemporary potential in this respect," Salehi said addressing the 42nd Session of the General Conference of UNESCO. Some excerpts of Salehi's statement are as follows: It is my honor to address the 42nd Session of the General Conference of UNESCO. I would also like to congratulate you, Madame President, for presiding over this General Conference and at the same time pay tribute to the previous President. Iran's strategic location, nestled between the crossroads of East and South Asia has endowed the nation with a profound legacy of knowledge exchange. This historical backdrop has transformed Iran into a cultural bridge, fostering intellectual and cultural interactions that have transcended borders and civilizations. JundiShapur, the oldest university of the world in the southwest of Iran, can be mentioned here as an example, the 1750th anniversary of whose establishment was acknowledged by UNESCO in 2017. As a candidate for the Executive Board of UNESCO for the 2023-2027 terms, I wish to reiterate that our candidacy is imbued with our steadfast commitment to fostering global cooperation and mutual understanding through education, science and culture, alongside unwavering dedication and passion. We firmly believe that introducing a rotation of members can bring fresh air into the organization, ushering in new perspectives and innovative approaches. Recent incidents, where the sanctity of the Holy Quran was violated, challenge the fostering of mutual respect and understanding among diverse communities. These distressing events underscore the presence of forces that seek to sow discord and division among us, emphasizing the need for unity and empathy in our global society.

IRAN NEWS



Steel Export Rises 15% in 7 Months

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's steel export increased by 15 percent during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22), compared to the same period in the past year, the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) announced. According to the ISPA, the value of the country's steel export stood at \$4.2 billion in the mentioned seven-month period. The latest report by the World Steel Association (WSA) indicates that Iran's steel output reached 22.1 million tons in the first nine months of 2023, registering a 0.6 percent decline as compared to the same period in the previous year. Iran was ranked 10th among the world's top steel producers during the first nine months of 2023. The Islamic Republic's monthly crude steel output stood at 2.4 million tons in September, indicating a decrease of 12.7 percent compared to the figure for September 2022.

Eight MPs Barred From Next Year's Election



TEHRAN - Eight members of Iran's parliament have been disqualified from running for reelection next year, according to the initial results of the vetting process. The disqualified lawmakers include two members of the Minority Faction in parliament and several critics of government. Gholamreza Noori Qazaljah, the representative of Bostanabad and the leader of the Minority Faction, took to the social media platform X to announce his intention to protest his disqualification. Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi, a member of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission and the vice chairman of the Minority Faction, also announced his disqualification on X. Shargh newspaper reported the disqualification of three representatives of Tabriz - Ahmad Alirezabegi, Masoud Pezeshkian and Alireza Manadi Sefidan. Alirezabegi told the paper he had been disqualified due to a conviction in a case related to revelations that dozens of MPs were given SUVs to scrap a motion last year to impeach the minister of Industry, Mines and Trade. Mohammad Khodabakhshi, the representative of Aligodarz, Jalil Mukhtar (Abadan) and Jalal Mahmudzadeh (Mahabad) are also among the MPs who have announced their disqualification. According to the official IRNA news agency, 24,829 candidates are seeking to run for the 290-seat parliament in the general elections set for March 1, 2024.



Cuba to Facilitate Admission of Iranian Firms

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel has underscored that his government will pave the way for admission of Iranian companies in the market of the Latin American country. President Diaz-Canel, accompanied by a group of Cuban officials, made the remark during his visit to Iran's pavilion at the Havana International Fair FIHAV 2023, declaring that they will facilitate entry for Iranian companies into the Cuban market. The Cuban president inaugurated the 39th Havana International Fair in the presence of a number of ministers and officials, as well as diplomats and political representatives from various states and trade delegations from 20 world nations. President Diaz-Canel expressed gratitude to the representatives of Iranian companies at the pavilion of the Islamic Republic, emphasizing

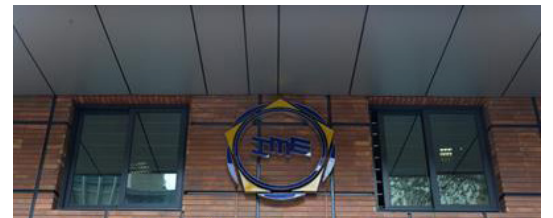
the need for the participation of Iranian firms in supplying consumer goods in his country. Havana has been waiting for the shipment of Iranian goods into the Cuban market for a long time, he noted. Some 63 countries participate in the 39th Havana International Fair, where 844 Cuban and foreign companies showcase their products in an area of 17,000 square meters at the Expocuba fairground. The pavilion of Iran has been set up in an area of 100 square meters, where around 10 firms exhibit food industries, renewable energies, telecommunications industries, biotechnology, detergent industries, cosmetic and hygiene products, cellulose industry, and knowledge-based products in the telecommunications sector, located in Hall 24 of the FIHAV 2023.

Iran, Turkmenistan Customs Services Explore Enhanced Cooperation



TEHRAN - Representatives of the state customs services of Turkmenistan and Iran discussed issues of strengthening cooperation within the framework of meetings at the Sarakhs-Sarakhs checkpoints on the border of the two countries. According to the official information of the State Customs Service of Turkmenistan, the parties discussed issues of customs clearance of goods around the clock at this border checkpoint, as well as the exchange of preliminary information. The first part of the meeting took place on the territory of Iran, and then in the afternoon, the delegations moved to Turkmenistan's side to continue negotiations. During the visit, the Iranian side got acquainted with the work and infrastructure of the customs post of Turkmenistan, inspected the halls of entry and exit, and also got acquainted with the functioning of the installed X-ray equipment. In addition, a separate meeting of the joint working group of Turkmen and Iranian customs departments was conducted to implement the Joint Action Plan for 2023-2024, which was signed by the parties in May of this year. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan has been actively growing its customs industry in recent years, with an emphasis on modernizing infrastructure, customs procedures, and streamlining the border for international trade. This commitment to current standards and efficiency in customs activities adds to the region's trade and economic progress by strengthening cooperation with foreign partners, particularly Iran.

Weekly Trade Up by 10% on IME



TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,871,480 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$601m on its physical market, posting growths of 10% in volume of trades compared to the figures of the previous week. According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,357,408 tons of commodities valued at nearly \$382m. On this floor the IME sold 1,284,083 tons of cement, 590,000 tons of iron ore, 337,115 tons of steel, 133,000 tons of sponge iron, 7,670 tons of copper, 6,090 tons of aluminum, 1,000 tons of zinc, 500 tons of cast iron and 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate. Based on this report, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 455,563 tons of commodities worth more than \$164m. Commodities traded on this floor included 167,500 tons of vacuum bottom, 103,779 tons of bitumen, 91,678 tons of polymeric products, 35,067 tons of chemicals, 35,000 tons of lube cut, 13,565 tons of sulfur, 5,584 tons of oil, 5,326 tons of petroleum products, 320 tons of feedstocks and 200 tons of waterproofing materials. The IME also traded within the same week 58,509 tons of goods on its side market.

Iran Private Sector Not Satisfied With Low Trade Among ECO States



TEHRAN - Vice-President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Qadir Qiafeh says the current low level of trade between ECO members does not match with the scope of this organization. He made the remarks addressing the 5th ECO Business Forum in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on Friday. With abundant natural resources and workforce, the organization member states have to tap into the potentials and combine efforts to give a boost to intra-regional cooperation, he said. Noting that the ECO member countries have had a \$1.1 trillion trade with the world in 2022, Qiafeh said that as low as \$96 billion of the sum was the share of intra-regional trade. He also noted that this region has observed as low as 1.5% of the world's total \$1.6 trillion foreign direct investment (FDI) which does not match with the capacities and potentials of this influential part of the world. He called for further cooperation within the frameworks of ECO common market, implementing an agreement for facilitating visa requirements among ECO members, e-commerce, and launching a joint monetary fund for barter of goods. The Iran Chamber of Commerce vice president underlined the need for activating ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) which he said would pave the way for a free trade agreement within the member states in accordance with the provisions of the country's Vision 2025.



Israel's Atrocious Campaign in Gaza Bears No Military Value

TEHRAN (MNA) - The commander of the Iranian Army has strongly censured the ongoing Israeli military onslaught against Gazan people, emphasizing that the atrocious campaign in the besieged territory bears no military value. Speaking at a ceremony in the western Iranian city of Saqqez, Kordestan Province, Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said Operation al-Aqsa Storm on October 7 was a "turning point" in the battles to liberate Palestinian lands, noting that it accelerated the downfall of the Israeli regime. He also echoed earlier remarks by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei that the irreparable defeat that the Tel Aviv regime sustained in the wake of the large-scale operation cannot be repaired through atrocities and vicious attacks. "The brutal actions being committed nowadays in the Gaza Strip are devoid of any military value. Aerial bombardments of defenseless, vulnerable, and unarmed people taking refuge in houses, schools, public facilities, and hospitals are not worth even a single second in comparison with the infiltration into the [so-called] intelligence and operational barriers of the ominous [Israeli] regime. It [Israel] cannot reverse the defeat," Mousavi pointed out. The high-ranking Iranian military figure went on to say that Israeli war crimes once again exposed the true nature of the United States and its bogus claims to advocate for human rights and reintroduced Palestine as the primary issue of the Muslim world and the international community. Mousavi emphasized that Operation al-Aqsa Storm, along with the support of freedom-loving people worldwide and the heroic steadfastness of Gazans, showed once again that the Israeli regime is weaker than a "spider's web," and will "collapse sooner than expected."



Iran's PMI Continues to Thrive for a 2nd Consecutive Month

TEHRAN - Iran Chamber of Commerce has released the country's new PMI data for the fiscal month of Mehr (September 23 - October 22) which is above the threshold (above 50) for a second month in a row. According to the new PMI reading, Iran's monthly PMI stood at 54.15. Although the figure is slightly lower than 54.34 reported last month, it is still above the threshold (above 50) which indicates the Iranian economy continued to thrive in the month under review. There are however signs that in addition to the shortage of liquidity and bank loans which have been hindering the production sector, some surprise unprofessional decisions taken by the customs administration and the ministry of industry have also caused serious problems for a significant number of companies. The Statistics and Economic Analysis Center of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, the sponsor and coordinator of the survey, announces the whole economy PMI data in a report every month. The headline PMI is a number from 0 to 100, such that over

50 shows an expansion of the economy when compared with the previous month. A PMI reading under 50 indicates contraction and a reading of 50 implies no change. PMI is an index of the prevailing direction of economic trends, aiming to provide information about business conditions to company directors, analysts and purchasing managers. The "raw materials price" sub-index hit 72.25 in the month under review to register its highest in three months. The "price of goods and services" sub-index have also registered its highest in five months to hit 59.96. The "employment" sub-index (49.56) was registered under the threshold for a third consecutive month. The "raw material inventory" sub-index (47.10) has registered its lowest in three months which have been declining in all the three major parts of the economy including agriculture, industry and services. The "exports of goods and services" (49.00) has been below the threshold for a fourth month in a row although it has slightly improved from the figure reported last month.

Chinese Firms Aiding Russia Face Significant Consequences

SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) - U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the U.S. government had seen evidence that Chinese firms may be aiding in the flow of equipment to Russia's war effort despite Western sanctions, and said she had urged China to crack down. Yellen said she raised the issue during two days of meetings with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, expressing concern that equipment "helpful to Russia's military" was evading sanctions and getting to Moscow to aid its war against Ukraine. "I stressed that companies must not provide material support to Russia's defense industrial sector and that they will face significant consequences if they do," Yellen told reporters at a news conference in San Francisco. "We are determined to do all that we can to stem this flow of material that aids Russia in conducting this brutal and illegal war," Yellen said, warning that any companies aiding Moscow's war effort could face sanctions.



EU Has 'Plan B' If Hungary Vetoes 50b Euro Aid for Ukraine



Hungarian veto and give Ukraine 50 billion euros (\$53.4b) in aid, officials in the bloc said, as Kyiv struggles to push back Russia's invasion 21 months into the war. The bloc's executive has proposed expanding budget support to help Ukraine pay salaries and meet other expenses as the conflict grinds on, and the EU's 27 member states are due to vote on the package at a Dec. 14-15 summit in Brussels. But some worry the aid could be blocked by Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban who has touted his ties with Moscow and objected to similar support in the past. Such pay-outs from the shared EU budget need unanimous support of all member states. Asked for comment, Hungarian government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs said that any financial aid to Ukraine should be separate from the EU budget. He said the EU needed a new strategy for Ukraine and that all financial decisions should stem from that. If Budapest does wield its veto, two EU officials said the bloc had a way to get around it by asking each of the other EU governments to set up their own aid package with Kyiv. All together, the bilateral pacts would come to as much as "Hungary risks overstretching its luck. We'd prefer to have them on board but there comes a point when people get fed up with Budapest holding everyone hostage. The workaround is tiresome but we have it if need be," one EU official said. A second EU official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, agreed. "The issue of money for Ukraine will be solved one way or another, Kyiv will get EU support," the official said. Last year, Hungary vetoed a similar proposal to give 18 billion euros in financial assistance to Ukraine in 2023. After months of wrangling, Budapest finally agreed to the package after winning what it said were concessions from the bloc on aid to Hungary, and hearing that the EU would use a similar workaround to push it through anyway. Asked if the EU would follow that path again if needed, European Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said this week: "Last year, we were indeed discussing 'Plan B'... But we were able to avoid this scenario last year. I hope will be also able to avoid this scenario this year." In power for more than a decade, Orban has been locked in increasingly bitter battles with others in the EU over a range of issues including democratic standards, foreign policy, migration and LGBT rights. Under EU rules, however, the strategy of bypassing Hungary cannot be applied to a decision due in December on whether to start EU accession negotiations with Kyiv, a coveted prize for Ukraine as it fights Russia. That decision requires unanimity of the 27 EU members, something that is far from certain given Orban's stance on the war. Speaking separately on Friday, Orban said he was opposed to launching membership talks with Kyiv. He also said there was no link between that matter and his disputes over billions of euros of EU funds for Hungary suspended over democracy concerns. EU officials told Reuters last month that they were looking at unlocking at least some of that money as the bloc seeks to win Orban's vote for Ukraine. The officials insisted, however, Budapest would still need to meet the necessary conditions.

Sanchez Wins Support for PM Bid



MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain's acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez looked assured of another term in office after securing the backing of two more regional parties, but it comes amid widespread anger over his pledge of amnesty for Catalan separatists. The confirmed support of the National Basque Party (PNV) and the Canaries' Coalition, along with that of Catalan separatist party Junts confirmed on Thursday, would give Sanchez an absolute majority in the 350-member lower house in a vote due to take place in the coming days. "We have managed to secure a majority that will make possible the investiture of Pedro Sanchez," acting minister for parliamentary relations Felix Bolanos said in an interview with SER radio station. The more complicated deal was the one secured on Thursday with Junts, which includes passing a contentious law granting amnesty to those convicted over Catalonia's attempt to secede from Spain in 2017. "We have very far apart and different positions but this deal means we are doing our best to understand each other. Spain and Catalonia deserve that," Bolanos said. Opinion polls have painted a picture of a country divided over the question of amnesty, even within the ranks of the Socialist Party. A Metroscopia survey in September showed 70% of Spaniards - including 59% of Socialist supporters - were against an amnesty. Another poll in mid-October for La Sexta TV, however, suggested the country was more evenly divided, with 50.8% rejecting the amnesty and 49% backing it - though support reached 70% within Catalonia. On Nov. 5, a Sigma Dos survey similarly found that 51% would reject an amnesty - including 40% of socialist voters. After an inconclusive election held on July 23, Sanchez's Socialist Party spent weeks negotiating with smaller parties including far-left platform Sumar and Catalan, Galician and Basque nationalist parties, most of which had supported Sanchez early in 2020 for his previous term. With Junts and PNV and the national and regional left-wing parties, Sanchez would win an absolute majority of 178 out of 350 lawmakers. Later on Friday, the Socialist Party added one vote more to its wide coalition after Canary Islands' regionalist party Coalicion Canaria also agreed to back Sanchez. Bolanos said the Catalan amnesty law would help ease tension in Catalonia as it would free school directors, firefighters and other civil servants who helped organize an illegal referendum on the region's independence in 2017 from legal proceedings. The most divisive aspect of the proposed amnesty though is it would allow Catalan separatist leaders such as Junts head Carles Puigdemont, who fled the country in the wake of the referendum and a short-lived unilateral independence declaration, to run for office again. Sanchez's conservative opponents have accused him of putting the rule of law on the line for his own political gain. Spanish judges have also said an amnesty would be a violation of the principles of constitutional checks and balances. A police group, APROGCA, on Friday said it was ready to "shed every last drop of our blood" to defend the "sovereignty and independence of Spain", prompting the Interior Ministry to order an investigation into whether the group breached police neutrality, according to newspaper El Mundo. As a deal between Junts and the Socialists edged nearer in the past week, the mood in the country became increasingly febrile, with protesters clashing with police outside the Socialists' headquarters in Madrid each evening.



Gaza Death Toll Rises; Israel Faces Pressure to Protect Palestinian Civilians

GAZA (Dispatches) - Israel faced mounting international pressure, including from its main ally the United States, to do more to protect Palestinian civilians in Gaza as the death toll rose and fighting intensified between Israeli forces and Hamas militants near and around hospitals. Global calls for Israeli restraint increased as the number of Palestinians killed rose above 11,000 in a five-week-old Israeli bombardment launched against Hamas in retaliation for its deadly Oct. 7 rampage in southern Israel. In his strongest comments to date on the plight of civilians caught in the Gaza cross-fire, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters on a visit to India on Friday: "Far too many Palestinians have been killed; far too many have suffered these past weeks." Blinken welcomed daily four-hour humanitarian pauses by Israel that the White House announced on Thursday and said more action was needed to safeguard Gaza's civilians. But he reaffirmed U.S. support for Israel's campaign to ensure that Gaza can no longer be used "as a platform for launching terrorism." French President Emmanuel Macron, in a BBC interview published late on Friday, said Israel must stop bombing Gaza and killing civilians. France, he said, "clearly condemns" the "terrorist" actions of Hamas, but that while recognizing Israel's right to protect itself, "we do urge them to stop this bombing" in Gaza. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said world leaders should be condemning Hamas, and not Israel. "These crimes that Hamas (is) committing today in Gaza will be committed tomorrow in Paris, New York and anywhere in the world," Netanyahu said. Israel has said that Hamas militants, who are holding as many as 240 hostages of different nationalities taken in last month's attack, would exploit a truce to regroup if there were a ceasefire. Saudi Arabia was to host an extraordinary joint Islamic-Arab summit in Riyadh on Saturday, the Saudi foreign ministry said. The joint meeting "will be held in response to the exceptional circumstances taking place in the Palestinian Gaza Strip as countries feel the need

to unify efforts and come out with a unified collective position," it said. Fighting intensified overnight into Saturday near Gaza City's overcrowded hospitals, which Palestinian officials said were hit by explosions and gunfire. "Israel is now launching a war on Gaza City hospitals," said Mohammad Abu Selmeh, director of Al Shifa hospital. He said later that at least 25 people were killed in Israeli strikes on Al-Buraq school in Gaza City, where people whose homes had been destroyed were sheltering. Gaza officials said missiles landed in the courtyard of Al Shifa, the enclave's biggest hospital, in the early hours of Friday, damaged the Indonesian Hospital and reportedly set fire to the Nasser Rantissi paediatric cancer hospital. Israel's military said later that a misfired projectile launched by Palestinian militants in Gaza had hit Shifa. The hospitals are in northern Gaza, where Israel says the Hamas militants who attacked it last month are concentrated, and are full of displaced people as well as patients and doctors. Israeli government spokesman Eylon Levy said the Hamas headquarters was in Shifa hospital's basement, which meant the hospital could lose its protected status and become a legitimate target. Israel says Hamas hides weapons in tunnels under hospitals, charges Hamas denies. Israeli tanks have taken up positions around the Nasser Rantissi hospital as well as the Al-Quds hospital, medical staff said earlier. Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qidra said Israel had bombed Shifa hospital buildings five times. "One Palestinian was killed and several were wounded in the early morning attack," he said by phone. Videos verified by Reuters showed scenes of panic and people covered in blood. World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the United Nations Security Council that a child is killed on average every 10 minutes in the Gaza Strip. "Nowhere and no one is safe," he said. Palestinian officials said on Friday that 11,078 Gaza residents had been killed in air and artillery strikes since Oct. 7.



India, U.S. Push Defense Deals Amid Global Challenges

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India and the United States announced progress on key defense deals and said they would expand their growing partnership in the face of geopolitical challenges as their top diplomats and senior ministers met on Friday. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in New Delhi as part of their annual "2+2 Dialogue", focused on the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries which were once on opposite sides of the Cold War are now working on landmark deals including for the U.S. to supply and manufacture engines for Indian fighter jets. Indian Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane said that deal between the aerospace unit of General Electric and India's state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics was on track. "We are finalising the commercial arrangements and the necessary legal requirements are being put in place," he told reporters after the talks. A more than \$3 billion deal for India to buy 31 armed drones made by General Atomics is also being processed and India is waiting for the company to get U.S. government clearances for the next steps, Aramane said. Washington had offered several infantry combat vehicle systems and New Delhi has expressed interest, he added without giving details. Indian media reports have said the Pentagon has offered the Stryker family of eight-wheeled armoured fighting vehicles produced by General Dynamic Land Systems and that New Delhi is interested in jointly manufacturing them in India. Before the talks, Defence Secretary Austin said it was more important than ever that the world's two largest democracies exchange views and find common goals "in the face of urgent global challenges": "We're integrating our industrial bases, strengthening our inter-operability and sharing cutting-edge technology," he said. India-U.S. relations have steadily grown stronger on several fronts in the last two decades but New Delhi has also carefully preserved long-standing relations with Russia, much to the frustration of the West amid the war in Ukraine. India has close strategic links with Israel and strong diplomatic and economic relationships with oil and gas producing countries in the Middle East. New Delhi has condemned the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants in Israel as a "terrorist attack" while also reiterating its longstanding position for an independent Palestine. A joint statement issued after Friday's talks said the two sides called for the "immediate release of all remaining hostages" in Gaza. "They expressed support for humanitarian pauses and committed to continue close diplomatic coordination, including with key partners in the region, to prevent the conflict from spreading, preserve stability in the Middle East, and work toward a political solution and durable peace," it said.

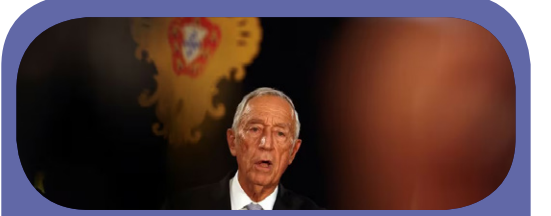
Philippines Denounces China for Unprovoked Acts of Coercion' to Block Resupply Mission

MANILA (Dispatches) - The Philippines condemned China's coast guard for "unprovoked acts of coercion and dangerous maneuvers," including its use of a water cannon against one of its boats in an attempt to disrupt a resupply mission in the South China Sea. China's actions, the Philippines said, have not only "put the lives of our people at risk," but have "put into question and significant doubt the sincerity of its calls for peaceful dialogue". The regular resupply missions support the Philippines' troops stationed in an intentionally grounded dilapidated warship on Second Thomas Shoal, a hotly disputed atoll in the South China Sea that Manila calls Ayungin and is known as Renai Reef in China. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, including the Second Thomas Shoal, and has deployed hundreds of vessels to patrol there. These include what Manila refers to as "Chinese maritime militia", which it said were involved in the latest attempt to obstruct the resupply mission. Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Friday at a regular press conference that Beijing opposes actions that undermine China's sovereignty and interests and has lodged solemn representations with the Philippine embassy. China's coast guard said two small Philippine transport ships and three coast guard



ships entered the waters without the permission of the Chinese government and urged the Philippines to stop infringing on Beijing's sovereignty. It said in a statement its actions were lawful and it has made temporary special arrangements for the Philippine side to transport food and other necessary daily necessities. In a second statement late on Friday, the coast guard said that the Philippine vessels had insisted on "rushing into" the area in an "unsafe and unprofessional" manner, and that it approached the vessels for verification purposes. The Philippines' government said the resupply mission was completed, even as its boats were "subjected to extremely reckless and dangerous harassment at close proximity" by the Chinese coast guard's inflatable boats inside the shoal. For years, Manila and Beijing have been

embroiled in on-off confrontations at the Second Thomas Shoal as China has become more assertive in pressing its maritime claims, alarming rival claimants and other states operating in the South China Sea, including the United States and Japan. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said during his visit to Manila on Saturday that his country, the Philippines and the United States were cooperating to protect the freedom of the South China Sea. On Thursday, the Philippines said it was acquiring five 97-metre (318-ft) multi-role response vessels to strengthen the capabilities of its coast guard and the 29.3 billion pesos (\$524 million) project would be funded by Official Development Assistance loans from Japan. Both Japan and Washington have their support behind a 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, that said Beijing's expansive claims had no legal basis, delivering a historic legal victory for the Philippines. Under the ruling, the shoal is inside the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. China's use of water cannons followed a series of incidents in the South China Sea, including the collisions between China's vessels and two Manila ships on Oct. 22. The Philippines accused China coastguard of "intentionally" colliding with its vessels.



Portugal President Calls March Snap Election

LISBON (Dispatches) - Portugal will hold a snap parliamentary election on March 10, its second in as many years. President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa said, following Tuesday's abrupt resignation of the Socialist prime minister amid a corruption investigation. Yet, the president said he would only disband parliament, where the Socialist Party (PS) has a majority of seats, after the final vote on the 2024 budget bill, due on Nov. 29. The house approved the bill on first reading on Oct. 31. Speaking after meeting his consultative body, the Council of State, and talking to the main political parties a day earlier, Rebelo de Sousa said allowing lawmakers to pass budget will "allow to meet the expectations of many Portuguese" and deploy EU recovery funds in projects. He said the government will remain in functions for now, but the election was needed to provide "clarity and direction to overcome an unexpected void that surprised and disturbed the Portuguese." The budget includes lower income tax rates for the middle class, social benefits focused on the poorest and a 24% jump in public investment to spur slowing economic growth. By law, an election needs to be held within 60 days of the publishing of the presidential decree dissolving parliament. Antonio Costa stepped down as prime minister on Tuesday after prosecutors detained his chief of staff and named one of his top ministers as a formal suspect in an investigation into alleged illegalities in his government's handling of lithium and hydrogen projects, as well as a large-scale data centre. Prosecutors said Costa was also the target of a related probe. He has denied wrongdoing. Some of those detained in the investigation appeared before a Lisbon court on Thursday. They were suspected of crimes of corruption and influence-peddling, prosecutors said. "I hope that time, sooner rather than later, will allow us to clarify what happened," Rebelo de Sousa said. Costa expressed disappointment about Rebelo de Sousa's decision, saying that instead of calling the election the president could have accepted his party's proposal to name Bank of Portugal governor and former Socialist finance minister Mario Centeno as the new premier. "The president understood that it was better to hold an election than having a stable, renewed government under the leadership of Mario Centeno," Costa said. "The country did not deserve to go to the polls." Since coming to power in 2015 in the aftermath of a debt crisis and international bailout, Costa has presided over a period of strong economic growth during which his successive governments quashed the budget deficit and reduced the debt burden, winning praise in Europe for sound fiscal policies. S&P Global Ratings said on Wednesday that his demise "does not pose immediate risks to the country's creditworthiness" and saw only modest risks to next year's public finances. Filipe Garcia, head of Informacao de Mercados Financieiros consultants, said there was "certain consensus among the parties that are expected to form a government", be it the centre-left PS or the centre-right Social Democrats (PSD), on maintaining conservative budgetary policies and reducing public debt. At home, Costa's government has been criticised for failing to do enough to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, which has made it harder for people in one of Western Europe's poorest nations to make ends meet. Housing prices, fuelled by incentives to lure wealthy foreigners to the country, have soared since 2015 and more than 50% of workers earned less than 1,000 euros (\$1,066.30) per month last year, according to government data. By calling the March election, Rebelo de Sousa also addressed the need of the PS to pick a new leader to run. Earlier, PS President Carlos Cesar said March would be the best timing, while other parties pointed to January or February.

VAR Controversies Prompt Calls for Action in English Premier League

LONDON (Dispatches) - VAR was supposed to help cut out egregious and costly refereeing mistakes but the technology has come under heavy fire from Premier League managers who have lost faith in the system. The video assistant referee was introduced in the 2019/20 season for "clear and obvious errors" or "serious missed incidents" in specific situations. The promise was that it would lead to "more correct and fairer judgements", even though the Premier League conceded that 100 per cent accuracy was impossible. But feelings are running high after high-profile incidents that have overshadowed the action on the pitch. Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta launched a blistering attack on the decision to let Newcastle's goal stand after his team's 1-0 defeat last weekend, labelling it a "disgrace". Anthony Gordon's second-half goal was checked for three separate VAR offences but survived them all to earn Newcastle the three points. "We didn't deserve to lose the match," Arteta told Sky Sports. "We lost the match because of the clear and obvious decisions. It's embarrassing. A disgrace." The Spaniard's comments were made in the heat of the moment but the club came out strongly in support of their manager in a statement the following day. "Arsenal Football Club wholeheartedly supports Mikel Arteta's post-match comments after yet more unacceptable refereeing and VAR errors on Saturday evening," Arsenal said. The angry fallout after the game at St James' Park echoed another VAR controversy in the high-stakes fixture between Tottenham and Liverpool in late September. Officials wrongly disallowed a goal from Luis Diaz after a misunderstanding over the on-field decision and Spurs went on to win 2-1 at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. Referees body Professional Game Match Officials Ltd (PGMOL) released the audio of the decision that led to the disallowed Diaz goal. In the recording, video assistant referee Darren England says the check is "perfect" before swearing when he realises a mistake has been made. "They've restarted the game. Can't do anything, can't do anything," he adds in exasperation. PGMOL admitted a "significant human error" and Liverpool issued

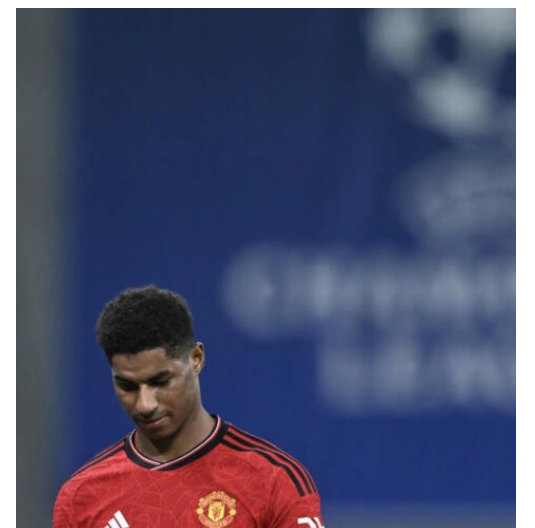
a statement in which they said "sporting integrity" had been undermined. "We fully accept the pressures that match officials work under but these pressures are supposed to be alleviated, not exacerbated, by the existence and implementation of VAR," the club said. Manager Jurgen Klopp even called for the game to be replayed. Wolves have far more cause for complaint, with four high-profile penalty decisions going against them, potentially with far-reaching consequences. Arteta stuck to his guns before Arsenal's Champions League match against Sevilla this week, suggesting it was the duty of managers to discuss the issues around the use of VAR. "Errors are part of evolution," he said. "The trajectory is never going to be (always upwards), there are always going to be bumps in the road and these things are necessary to improve the game in the right way. "But we have to talk loudly. If you have a problem and you put it in your drawer, the problem is in the drawer and it's going to stink at some point." League Managers Association chief executive Richard Bevan says coaches want to see changes — including the video assistant referee working with the same referee each week. "PGMOL have confirmed to us that they are actively looking at how best to incorporate VARs into match-day refereeing teams, to ensure the dynamic between on-field referee and VAR is conducive to producing positive outcomes," Bevan told the Daily Mail. "The managers are also calling for a review (and simplification) of the interpretation of the term 'clear and obvious' in VAR decision-making, as this is a cause of much confusion at present." Henry Winter, chief football writer for The Times, urged the Premier League to listen to the managers of its clubs. "Anyone who attends a game or watches on television knows that VAR has never been more contentious," he said. "Some grown-up debate is required. The starting point is that, love it or loathe it, VAR is here to stay. "We live in a technological age and other sports have embraced it successfully, so it's about English football getting it right."

Djokovic Gets the Tougher Draw



TURIN (Dispatches) - The ATP Finals, the season-ending extravaganza which theoretically brings the season to an end, scheduled to kick-off on Sunday 12th November in Turin, Italy, pitches the top eight most successful players of the year, against each other. The draw was made on Thursday and, with Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz assured of landing in different groups, the real question was in which of the two the other six players would land up. As it turns out Jannik Sinner, making his debut in the prestigious event in front of his home crowd, ends up in the Green Group headed by Djokovic, and it includes Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas, a former champion, and Dane Holger Rune for the round-robin stages. Debutant Alcaraz's Red Group therefore, will feature the two Russian's former champion Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev plus another former title holder, Germany's Alexander Zverev. It would seem that Djokovic, the defending champion, has the tougher group as he tries to pull ahead of Roger Federer with, with who he currently shares six titles. The top two in each Group will go forward to play the semi-finals. Serbia's Djokovic has just to win one match in the round-robin stages to guarantee he will end the year as world No.1 ahead of Spain's Alcaraz and if successful, it would be the 8th time he ended a year at the top of the rankings.

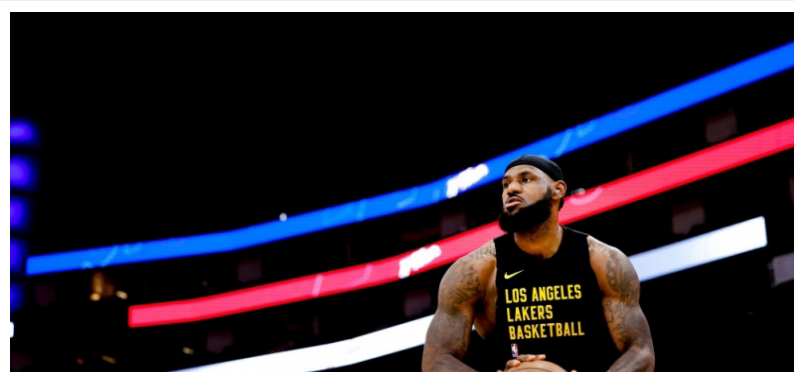
Ten Hag Not Happy With Rashford's Form at Man Utd



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag admitted Friday he is "not happy" with Marcus Rashford's form but remains convinced the England forward will get back to his best this season. Rashford's disputed red card in Copenhagen on Wednesday contributed to a dramatic United collapse as they blew a 2-0 lead and conceded two late goals to lose 4-3, dropping to the bottom of Group A in the Champions League with two games left. Gareth Southgate kept faith with the 26-year-old by naming him in his England squad on Thursday, but a player who scored 30 goals for United in all competitions last season has only one from 15 appearances for the club this term. "I think he's not happy, we are not happy," Ten Hag said of Rashford's performances. "We have an expectation. He has high expectations from himself. In this moment he is not in the best form but I know he will be back. "I know when the team is playing better he will play better. He will go and score goals. I am confident of that. This season he will improve and score goals. He is totally in the team, he is aware of everything so I think he will be back on track." "It can happen very quickly and sometimes you only need one game. I'm sure he will get there." Mason Mount is been another player in the spotlight, with the 24-year-old midfielder struggling to make an impression since his £55 million (\$67 million) switch from Chelsea in July. Mount made his first start since early October in the 3-0 League Cup defeat to Newcastle on November 1 but was back on the bench against Fulham and Copenhagen, with questions being asked about his role in the side. However, Ten Hag said there had been no change in his expectations of the player. "It hasn't changed at all," he said. "He started the season and then he got injured. It's the worst moment for a new player to get injured because it stops the integration process. That was definitely a setback for us all and for him now he has to fight to get his place back." United's midweek defeat came at an extra cost as Jonny Evans limped off early after pulling up off the ball. The 35-year-old, who has been a regular starter in recent weeks, has been ruled out of the Luton match, adding to Ten Hag's defensive woes.

James Museum to Open in Hometown Akron on November 25

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Four-time NBA champion LeBron James will open his official museum on November 25 in his hometown of Akron, Ohio, the James Family Foundation announced. "LeBron James' Home Court" is described on its website as "A walk through the life and legacy of the kid from Akron" who was a teen prodigy and became a global superstar and four-time NBA Most Valuable Player. The museum, located in the foundation's House Three Thirty venue in Akron, promises "an immersive journey that offers a look at his life through original artifacts." The Home Court will also feature "a multimedia storytelling experience that offers a look at LeBron's life with never-before-seen items along his journey from Akron to the NBA, Olympics, business, philanthropy and beyond." Photos posted on social media show a series of televisions with highlights from James's career, a selection of trophies and memorabilia including from his American football days. "My dream was always to put Akron on the map so to have a place in my hometown that allows me to share my journey with my fans from all over the world means a lot to me," James said in a statement on social media. A self-guided tour will showcase never-before-seen items belonging to James, who was a high school star selected first overall in the 2003 NBA Draft by the nearby Cleveland Cavaliers. James sparked the Cavs to their first NBA Finals appearance in 2007 and was the NBA MVP in 2009 and 2010 before leaving for the Miami Heat, prompting anger from unhappy Cavs fans, some even burning James jerseys in frustration. James won two NBA titles and two more MVP awards in four seasons with the Heat, then returned to the Cavaliers in 2014 and in 2016 led the Cavs to their first NBA title, beating Golden State in the finals to give Cleveland its first major



sports champion since 1964. James departed again in 2018 to join the Los Angeles Lakers and in 2020 led them to an NBA crown. Last February, James surpassed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to become the NBA's all-time scoring leader.

Italy and Canada Reach BJK Cup Semis, Swiss Crash Out

SEVILLE (Dispatches) - Switzerland's reign as Billie Jean King Cup champions is over after they suffered a second successive loss in Seville, this time at the hands of the United States. Italy became the first nation through to the semi-finals after beating Germany 3-0 in Group D. Canada also made sure of first place in Group C as they won both singles matches against a Poland side missing world number one Iga Swiatek. Teenager Marina Stakusic enhanced her burgeoning reputation with a 4-6 7-5 6-3 defeat of Magdalena Frech before world number 20 Leylah Fernandez eased past Magda Linette. "I'm proud and ecstatic that we are in the semis," Fernandez said. "Happy I could execute my game plan." Last year's runners-up Australia edged Kazakhstan 2-1 in Group B although they can no longer qualify for the semi-finals. The United States arrived in Andalusia without top players Coco Gauff and Jessica Pegula but still proved too strong for a Swiss side missing Belinda Bencic who announced last week that she was expecting a baby. Danielle Collins used her experience to beat youngster Celine Naef 7-6(4) 6-1 before former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin overcame Viktorija Golubic 6-3 6-7(1) 7-5 to



give her team an unassailable lead in the tie. Kenin dominated the best part of two sets and was close to a straight-sets win before being dragged into a decider. Three match points came and went at 6-5 on her serve but she kept her cool to finish the job and send the Swiss packing. Kathy Rinaldi's team now face a Group A clash with the

Czech Republic on Friday to decide who goes through to the weekend's semi-finals. Italy had dispatched France on Wednesday and followed up strongly against Germany as Martina Trevisan secured a hardfought 7-6(6) 6-1 victory over Eva Lys. Jasmine Paolini, who like Trevisan also won her singles against France, then dispatched Anna-Lena Friedsam 6-3 6-2. Italy polished off the doubles as they moved to the semi-finals of the competition for the first time since 2014. "I think we have to rest tomorrow and be prepared for the next day. We've reached the semi-final which was a big goal for us," Italy captain Tathiana Garbin said. "We have to be happy but never satisfied." Australia had their backs to the wall after losing to Slovenia on Tuesday but went out fighting in captain Alicia Molik's last tie in charge. Molik changed her line-up and world number 155 Storm Hunter rewarded her faith by posting a 7-6(2) 6-4 victory over Anna Danilina, ranked a lowly 802nd. Yulia Putintseva got the Kazakhs back in the tie as she beat Kim Birrell 6-0 7-5 to set up a doubles decider. Doubles world number one Hunter then returned to court alongside Ellen Perez to take on Danilina and Putintseva and after splitting the opening two sets they held their nerve to win the match tiebreak 10-5.